



EPISODE 2x09: “OPEN WOUNDS”

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EXT. SAINT CHRISTOPHER – TOWN SQUARE – NIGHT

The HOVER-MULE smokes against the FOUNTAIN as its engine GRINDS.

JAYNE and NICO are on the ground, unconscious and beaten.

Beat.

Two MEN, armed with rifles, tentatively approach Jayne.

MAN#1

He a Reaver?

MAN#2

I don't know. Sirens've stopped. Maybe they left one of their own behind. Stay back now...

MAN#1

Looks more like he's been beaten than he cut on himself.

Jayne stirs, rolling over, semi-conscious.

MAN#2

Sure is ugly enough to be a Reaver.

MAN#3 (OS)

Don't matter. He's one of them outsiders set off the alarms, that's for certain.

A third MAN and WOMAN, also armed, have joined them.

WOMAN

String them up.

The men nod.

JAYNE

(trying to sit up)

Reaver? I ain't no Reaver!

MAN#2

Let's string 'em up!

The impromptu lynch mob moves toward Jayne.

JAYNE
Let's not!

The sound of approaching ENGINES drones above the town square. The mob and Jayne look up as—

SERENITY drops down out of the sky, shaky and barely under control.

MAN#1
Run!

The crowd scatters as Serenity comes in for a rough landing, partially on the fountain.

Water and shattered stone spray in every direction.

Almost immediately, the ramp lowers and SIMON rushes out, carrying a shotgun, which he fires into the air—sending the mob into further retreat.

JAYNE
Hey!

All business, Simon rushes to check NICO and then moves toward Jayne.

KAYLEE runs down the ramp, pausing as she sees the wounded.

KAYLEE
(looking at Nico)
Is she...?

SIMON
No.
(beat)
Kaylee? Is the hover-mule working?

She snaps out of it, runs to the hover-mule.

SIMON (cont'd)
(to Jayne)
Can you walk?

JAYNE
(grunting)
Maybe.
(looks at Serenity)
Who was flyin' the ship?

Kaylee, examining the hover-mule, laughs nervously as she glances at Serenity, flopped in the fountain.

KAYLEE

Glad Wash showed me what all them switches do 'fore he left. Guess I'm better at fixin' her than flyin' her, though.

(business again)

Hover-mule running okay.

Simon moves toward Nico. Jayne hobbles after.

SIMON

Help me load her on.

KAYLEE

Good thing it's her and not Jayne.

Simon glances in the direction where the crowd scattered.

SIMON

Where are the bounty hunters?

KAYLEE

Where's the Captain?

JAYNE

Gone. They're all gone.

(to Simon)

They wasn't after your sister, doc. Them bounty hunters, they just wanted Mal.

EXT. SPACE – SAME TIME

A sleek bounty hunter ship glides through the black.

INT. BOUNTY HUNTER SHIP – PASSENGER HOLD

There are two rows of three metal seats facing the center of the room. MAL and INARA sit in the center chairs, shackled hand and foot, opposite one another.

MAL

Inara? What're you doing here?

INARA

Being kidnapped. Same as you.

Mal looks over her shoulder, trying to see around the corner into the bridge. SMILING JACK TUNSTALL can just be seen, his back to Mal and Inara.

MAL

<Oh, Buddha's hidden behind>, you know this guy?

INARA

Never seen him before in my life.

MAL

You sure? Might be he was just... forgettable.

INARA

He's half a head taller than Jayne, Mal. I don't think I'd forget him.

MAL

(looks back at Inara)

He hurt you?

INARA

(shakes her head)

He stopped one of the others from hitting me. Said I was not to be damaged.

MAL

You look... good.

INARA

You don't.

MAL

Seems he ain't so concerned with how damaged I am.

(leans forward)

I must say, I do love what you've done with your hair.

Her hair is held back with two large pins, crossing in an "X."

INARA

(smiles)

Oh, this? It's nothing, I just...

(beat, and it clicks)

Oh. My hair. Of course. It's very... practical.

MAL

So very practical. Could you lean a little closer?

Inara leans close, forcing herself as far forward as possible, eyes to the floor.

Mal smells her hair for a beat before he bites on one of the pins and pulls it free.

Inara's hair drops over one shoulder, coiling around her neck, as she sits up

INARA
What do you intend to do with that?

MAL
(gritted, around the pin)
Jimmy the lock.

Mal shifts to the right, spits the pin into his hand, and starts fiddling with the lock.

INARA
"Jimmy?"

MAL
You know. Shove it in the hole. Wiggle it around. Hope somethin' pops. In my line of work, that's called jimmyin'. I believe you call that process somethin' a mite different.
(off Inara's glare)
'less, of course, his name happens to be Jimmy...

Inara rolls her eyes.

The sound of FOOTSTEPS comes from the direction of the bridge. Mal stops trying to pick the lock and hides the pin under his arm and atop the armrest.

Tunstall comes down from the bridge and looks Mal and then Inara.

MAL
Who're you workin' for?

TUNSTALL
You're a very direct man, Malcolm Reynolds. Honest.
Trustworthy.
(turns to Inara)
Practical.

Tunstall pulls the remaining pin from her hair.

Inara flinches as he moves the point of the pin toward her eye.

MAL
I try to be.

Tunstall faces Mal, and Mal raises his hand, exposing the hidden pin then dropping it.

Tunstall heads to a WAVE MONITOR above the two rows of metal seats, picking up Mal's pin on the way.

He punches a few buttons, and the monitor lights up, a face coming into focus.

TUNSTALL (to Wave)
Are the targets confirmed?

BADGER smiles down from the Wave monitor.

BADGER (via Wave)
Malcolm Reynolds and Inara Serra. Ain't you two jus' the cutest couple?



Act One

INT. TUNSTALL'S SHIP – CONTINUOUS

Mal and Inara look up at the Wave monitor.

Tunstall stands nearby, Inara's pins still in his hands.

BADGER (via Wave)
Aye, Mr. Tunstall. The targets are confirmed.

Tunstall nods and reaches to shut off the wave monitor when—

MAL
You win the lottery or somethin', Badger? Seems to me, kidnappers of this caliber come at a cost just a fraction outside your usual price range.

BADGER (via Wave)
(smiles)
'Ere you go again, always 'urtin' my feelin's. You an' me, Mal, we were friends once upon a time. And then you turn your back on me an' go an' work for them scurvy twins.

MAL
You turned on me – once that I know of, an' probably more. And just what did Inara do? She turn you down? Can't imagine why, with that chiselled jaw an' all...
(winks to Inara)
Chiseled out of what, I do not know.

TUNSTALL
That's enough!

MAL
Or what? You'll taser me in the chest?
(pulls against his cuffs)
Shackle me to a chair? Won't hit the lady...

TUNSTALL (via Wave)
(to Badger)
I think it's best, sir, that we end this Wave immediately.

Tunstall switches off the wave monitor and turns to Mal and Inara.

TUNSTALL
That was unpleasant.

MAL
Really? I thought it went quite well.

INARA
(nods, agreeing)
Better than usual, so far.

MAL
Best kidnapping I ever been a part of!

Tunstall is not amused.

TUNSTALL
Let me make something clear, captain. You can try to escape all you like, because it will only exhaust you and make you that much easier to handle properly. You can chit-chat all you like with your beautiful friend here, if that will help pass the time.
(fiercely)
I am a bounty hunter. If you call me a kidnapper again, I will cut out your tongue.

MAL
Don't see much difference between the two.

Tunstall toys with one of Inara's hairpins.

TUNSTALL
Then perhaps I should correct your misperception—
(points the pins at Mal's face)
—by putting your eyes out?

INARA
Is that part of your contract, Mister Tunstall?

Beat. Tunstall cools down.

TUNSTALL

(to Inara)

I apologize for losing my temper. It was very unprofessional of me.

(to Mal)

I trust we understand each other?

Mal stays silent.

INARA

Yes.

TUNSTALL

Good. I'll leave you two to yourselves.

Tunstall turns and walks away. Mal looks across at Inara.

MAL

Will you let me handle this?!

Mal yanks at his shackles, looking at them and trying to work free.

INARA

You heard him, Mal. That won't do any good.

MAL

I have to try. I can't just sit here—

INARA

I need you to be strong, Mal. We both need to be strong, if we're going to get through this. And anger does not equal strength.

Mal stops.

INARA (cont'd)

Be patient. Be calm. And wait for the moment. It will come.

MAL

I've been waitin' my whole life, and it hasn't come yet. You make your own moments, Inara. You should know that.

EXT. SPACE – ORBITING ABOVE SAINT CHRISTOPHER

Serenity sits silently in orbit.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – SAME TIME

Jayne sits on the infirmary counter, shirtless, a bandage around his abdomen. Simon finishes wrapping Jayne's ankle and stands.

SIMON

You're lucky I had the proper binders.

JAYNE

It's not gonna... fall off?

Kaylee and River stand in the doorway, looking in. Nico, still unconscious, is on the bed, one arm in a cast in a sling across her chest, the other under the covers.

SIMON

No, Jayne, your foot will not fall off, but I'd—

Jayne hops off the counter, wincing as he lands.

SIMON (cont'd)

—recommend staying off it for the next forty-eight hours.

JAYNE

Don't got no forty-eight hours. We're goin' after Mal.
Now.

SIMON

You're sure the bounty hunters were after the Captain? It could be some sort of diversion—

NICO

They got what they came for.

Nico hasn't shifted in the bed except to open her eyes.

NICO (cont'd)

That was Smiling Jack Tunstall and the Orion Recondos. They wanted any of us, we'd be with them right now. Kind of coin they charge, they can't afford to not get their man.

Simon steps away from Jayne, toward Nico.

SIMON

You sound like you respect them.

NICO

They reported directly to Allan Kreed during the war.
Turned the tide of more than a few battles for the
Alliance. If you could give me some sort of painkiller, by
the way, that would be just *jīn sè* <golden>.

(beat)

Also wouldn't mind if you did something about this.

She uses the arm in the cast to pull the covers back. Her other arm and leg are tied down with restraints.

KAYLEE

Cap'n gettin' took right after you join up seems awful
suspicious.

SIMON

I also find your knowledge of these Orion Recondos rather
interesting.

NICO

You're smart, doctor. If I was working with 'em, you
really think they'd've left me behind like this?

JAYNE

Cut her loose, doc.
(off Simon's look)
We need her to fly this boat.

SIMON

Fly? Where?

RIVER

Mixed metaphors. You're not the captain.

Jayne draws himself up, standing straight.

JAYNE

Someone's ruttin' well gotta be.

NICO

I'll do it.

JAYNE

(ignoring her)
We gotta get after Mal.

KAYLEE

Not t'undercut your authority, um, 'Captain,' but where we gonna go?

JAYNE

We're gonna—

(beat)

Well, soon's we figure out where Mal got took to, that's where we're goin'!

Simon and Kaylee share another look.

KAYLEE

I'll talk to Zoe. She'll know what to do.

SIMON

If she's right about how much these mercenaries cost, maybe one of Inara's clients knows something that could be of use.

(off Kaylee's sceptical look)

It's better than waiting.

Kaylee nods in agreement as she and Simon leave.

Jayne watches them go, a bit flustered.

JAYNE

Oh yeah? We'll, I'm gonna... I'll talk to Mister Universe!

He limps out of the infirmary. River, in the doorway, watches the three of them go.

NICO

(to River)

You want to untie me?

Beat.

RIVER

Not really.

INT. TUNSTALL'S SHIP – PASSENGER HOLD – SOME TIME LATER

Mal and Inara sit in their chairs, bored.

MAL

I spy with my little eye...

(stares at Inara's breasts)

Something round... and firm.

INARA

Mal, if you make me name another euphemism for my breasts, I will break out of these shackles and cut out your tongue myself.

Mal grimaces and shifts in his seat.

INARA (cont'd)

Are you okay?

MAL

Chest aches, is all. Where they tasered me.

(looks up)

And I have to piss like a racehorse.

INARA

I'm sorry I asked.

MAL

(beat)

So how'd they get you?

INARA

Pretended to represent a prospective student I'd been sent to test. I walked right into it.

MAL

So these guys have connections.

INARA

Yes, they must. The Guild has systems in place to prevent this sort of thing. Protocols. Tunstall and his men are very good. They can't come cheap.

MAL

Ain't like Badger to waste coin like this... On you, I mean. Not that, y'know, he'd be the first man to spend far too much coin on—

Tunstall enters, studying them.

TUNSTALL

(to Inara)

Trust your trip isn't too uncomfortable, ma'am. I apologize for the shackles, but they are an unfortunate necessity.

MAL

Just like a kidnapper to say that.

TUNSTALL

(sighs)

I thought we had an understanding Captain Reynolds.

(coldly)

I'd expect you to understand the difference between a professional and a common criminal.

MAL

Just call 'em like I see 'em, an' there ain't much about you that don't scream common. 'cept maybe the height.

INARA

Mal, don't...

MAL

And that hat. That is a lovely hat.

(beat)

For a kidnapper.

TUNSTALL

(weary)

You're dangerously close to silence, Captain.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – LATER

Jayne sits in the pilot seat, Kaylee in the co-pilot's. MISTER UNIVERSE is on one of the Wave monitors, and ZOE and BOOK are on another.

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)

Like I told the new, uh, captain, I wasn't the first one to muck with Saint Christopher's security systems today.

KAYLEE

They musta done it, right?

On the monitor, he busily clacks away at a keyboard.

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)

Not necessarily. Could be it's routine maintenance or some petty hacker messing about or...

Kaylee and Jayne wait for a beat, but Mr. Universe doesn't finish.

ZOE (via Wave)

We'll figure it out, Kaylee. We'll get the Captain back.

BOOK (via Wave)

The Orion Recondos are an impressive organization, and their services don't come cheap. Simon's smart to contact Inara. She has the right connections with that much coin. Do we have any idea who the Captain might have angered enough to spend that much?

JAYNE

Sure, preacher. You want the list alphabetic or by the order it happened?

Kaylee smiles a little. Jayne grins at her.

Simon walks onto the bridge.

SIMON

Any progress?

Kaylee shakes her head.

BOOK (via Wave)

We should be asking you, son.

SIMON

Inara? I couldn't get in touch with her. She's not answering any of her receivers. Even the one for her clients.

JAYNE

(leering grin)

Oh, I can't think of why.

KAYLEE

You got the number to Inara's client line?

MR. UNIVERSE (OS, via Wave)

(still typing away)

Now that is interesting.

Jayne and Simon turn toward the monitor.

KAYLEE

(glancing at Simon)

Certainly is.

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave, cont'd)

Our little intruder came in using military-grade equipment. Very nice. Very expensive. Mobile signal, so definitely from a ship.

ZOE (via Wave)
Can you backtrack it?

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)
Already on it, my Amazonian beauty.
(beat, to himself)
Gotcha, you squirmy little squirrel!

JAYNE
Got who?

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)
ID code for the ship. Very well-concealed. Three different layers of encryption. The first signal came in as a Wave message. See, it was sort of a—

JAYNE
Where they goin'?

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)
(to himself)
No one appreciates art these days.
(to the crowd)
I don't know where the ship is, or where it's going. All I have is an ID code, which I got at the receiving end of the Wave it sent to muck with the security system. I can send out a worm. Once the ship lands somewhere, assuming it's a legal landing, I'll be able to track it.

KAYLEE
If you got the ID from the Wave they sent to Saint Christopher, is there any way you can see if they sent any other Waves recently?

Universe perks up.

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)
You, my dear, are very, very clever. And not entirely uncute. In most circumstances, you'd need to scan Wave records from every planet in the 'Verse for the last few hours to see if there's a match. Could take days or weeks.
(hits a key)
But fortunately, my friends, you have me, and I happen to have already written a nifty little program to do it. It commands the wave record computers to do the work for me. Funny story, really—

JAYNE
How long's it gonna—

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)
Done! I have a match.

ZOE (via Wave)
Where?

MR. UNIVERSE (via Wave)
Persephone. Place called the Eavesdown Docks?

ZOE (via Wave)
Badger.

EXT. ORBIT ABOVE PERSEPHONE – SUNSET

Tunstall's ship descends through the atmosphere, directly into the sunset.

EXT. PERSEPHONE – ESTATE – SUNSET

A MANSION surrounded by a series of smaller OUT-BUILDINGS, a large LANDING PAD, and beautiful COURTYARDS, sit at the heart of seemingly endless ORCHARDS.

EXT. PERSEPHONE – MANSION LANDING PAD – SUNSET

Tunstall's ship lands.

EXT. TUNSTALL'S SHIP – SUNSET

Mal and Inara, their hands cuffed in front of them, are prodded down the ramp by Tunstall.

Inara looks directly at the mansion in the distance.

INARA
(quietly)
I know this place.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Jayne stands up, wincing as he puts weight on his foot. He walks over to Mr. Universe's wave monitor.

JAYNE
Much obliged, Mr. Universe.

MR. UNIVERSE
I'll keep on it, and Wave you again if—

Jayne shuts off the monitor.

JAYNE
(to Simon)
Go get Nico. We're goin' to Persephone.

SIMON
Nico can't fly the ship. She's full of painkillers.

NICO (OS)
Not just painkillers.

Nico stands at the doorway grinning like a leopard on the prowl, River just behind her.

She pops a PILL into her mouth with her good hand. She smiles.

Simon does not.

NICO (cont'd)
(to Simon)
Don't worry, I'm not raiding your cabinets. I brought my own.

SIMON
(to Jayne)
It's not advisable for her to fly this ship.

NICO (OS)
Advisable? Got out of those pesky restraints just fine.

Nico moves her fingers in the cast, illustrating her coordination.

RIVER
Danse macabre...

NICO
(to Jayne)
Persephone, huh? How fast?

Simon steps up to Nico to check her arm. She shoos him away.

KAYLEE
We should swing by Haven first, get Zoe, and—

JAYNE

We ain't goin' to Haven. It's in the whole other direction.

Kaylee looks to the Wave monitor for support.

KAYLEE

But we need Zoe, Jayne.

ZOE (via Wave)

Jayne's right. If you come get us, we could be too late.

JAYNE

See? Zoe says I'm right. Nico and me'll get Mal back.

Jayne takes a half-step, then stumbles from the pain in his leg.

SIMON

What are you going to do to Badger? Bleed on him?

(indicates Nico's cast)

Club him to death?

NICO

Who's Badger?

KAYLEE

(to Zoe)

You can get Millie's ship and catch up with us, right?

On the Wave monitor, Zoe and Book exchange a look.

Beat. No response.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

That the way it is? You leave, and you're gone for good,
even if we need you? Just like Inara?

BOOK (via wave)

Kaylee, we can't—

KAYLEE

(to herself)

Just like 'Nara...

(something clicks)

Just like...

(suddenly, to Simon)

You couldn't get hold of Inara neither?

Simon shakes his head.

Kaylee turns to Zoe's Wave monitor.

KAYLEE

What if maybe 'Nara got took, too? What if it ain't Badger at all?

EXT. PERSEPHONE – MANSION – SUNSET

Mal and Inara, led by Tunstall, walk up a long cobblestone path to the mansion.

A group of men waits at the entrance of the mansion, including Badger, WINTERS (a gray-haired man in livery), and a half-dozen SECURITY GUARDS in matching uniforms.

The mansion door opens before them.

VOICE (OS)

Now there's the smile made of sunlight.

ATHERTON WING stands in the doorway, smiling.



Act Two

EXT. PERSEPHONE – MANSION – MAIN GATE – CONTINUOUS

Inara breaks away from Tunstall, and takes a few steps toward Wing.

INARA

Atherton! What is the meaning of this?!

ATHERTON

You are my guests.

(indicates Winters)

My man Winters has prepared rooms for you both.

INARA

You had me kidnapped! You had Mal—

ATHERTON

I do apologize, Inara. For everything.

(walking toward her)

Did they hurt you?

TUNSTALL

No, they did not, sir.

INARA
(sarcastic)
They were perfect gentlemen.

ATHERTON
I intend to set things right, *bao bei*. Please believe me.
(touches her arm)
I only want the best for—

MAL
Take your hands off of her, Ath.

ATHERTON
Excuse me?

MAL
You don't get to touch her. Not this time. So you best
remove your hands from her right—

Atherton lashes out and strikes Mal. Mal falls back onto the ground. Badger laughs.

INARA
Atherton!

Mal, still cuffed, struggles to rise to his feet.

MAL
S'that all you got?

Atherton kicks Mal.

Winters and the guards move forward, protective of Atherton. Badger groans happily. Tunstall watches impassively.

ATHERTON
You've had a long flight. You both must be so tired...
(kicks Mal again)
You must get some...
(and again)
...sleep!

Mal hits the cobblestone walk, woozy but not unconscious.

ATHERTON
(to Winters)
See them to their rooms!

Winters and the security guards collect Mal from the ground and gently pull on Inara, leading them away.

INARA

Why are you doing this, Atherton?

ATHERTON

I will see you in the morning, dear. Try to get some rest.

(beat)

The travel has left you a bit haggard.

The group climbs the stairs. Badger, still smiling, follows them into the mansion.

Atherton and Tunstall are left alone.

ATHERTON (cont'd)

You have one more target to acquire, yes?

TUNSTALL

Say the word, and the job is done.

ATHERTON

Do it.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

The group on the bridge stands, the Wave monitors still active behind them.

SIMON

(to Kaylee)

Atherton Wing? But that... Does that make sense?

BOOK

He certainly does have the grudge and the coin.

ZOE

Location fits.

JAYNE

Wing, Badger, don't matter which of 'em it is, we still need t'get to Persephone.

(to Nico)

Let's get goin'.

On the monitor, Zoe's face is a cipher.

ZOE (via Wave)

You need to get to the Captain as soon as you can. And Inara, if you're right. You need to follow Jayne, and do what he says.

KAYLEE
Sure, Zoe, right. Until you get to Perseph—

ZOE (via Wave)
Kaylee, honey, we ain't comin' to Persephone.

Beat.

KAYLEE
Wha—? Why?

BOOK (via Wave)
Wash and Millie are on a supply run. There's not a ship or pilot on Haven can get us to Persephone.

KAYLEE
But—

ZOE (via Wave)
You have to save the Captain. I...
(beat)
I can't.

Silence on the bridge.

JAYNE
Kaylee, prep for full burn. We leave for Persephone now.

Kaylee walks off the bridge. Simon and River follow.

Nico sits down in the pilot's seat.

Jayne hobbles over to the Wave monitor that Zoe and Book are on.

JAYNE
Zoe, I—

ZOE (via Wave)
Don't say anything, Jayne. Just get him back.

INT. ATHERTON'S MANSION – HALLWAY - DUSK

Mal and Inara are escorted by Winters, Badger, and a half-dozen guards.

BADGER
The mighty Malcolm Reynolds with nothin' to say? I must mark my calendar.

MAL

You've left me speechless, Badger. I'm impressed. Hirin' the Orion Recondos. Workin' with an uppity has-been like Atherton Wing. You're movin' up in the 'Verse.

BADGER

An' you'll be movin' down soon enough. Lowered into the ground. Say six feet?

MAL

You better pray that happens. Next time my hands are unbound, I'm gonna make you squeak like a—

INARA

Would you all just stop!

(to Winters)

Take me to Atherton. Let me speak to him.

They stop at a door. Winters opens it with a MAGNETIC DOORKNOB as one of the guards uncuffs Inara.

INARA

Thank you. I'm sure this has all been a mis—

WINTERS

Mr. Wing will see you in the morning, Miss Serra.

(pushes her into the bedroom)

Good night.

Winters shuts the door and removes the magnetic knob. POUNDING on the door from the other side is heard, as well as Inara's MUFFLED VOICE.

Winters leads Mal to the next door. He opens it.

Winters drops the shackle key in Mal's hand and pushes him into the bedroom.

BADGER

(waving to Mal)

Nighty-night.

MAL

Now wait just a—

Winters slams the door.

INT. ATHERTON'S MANSION - MAL'S ROOM - DUSK

Mal works on undoing his cuffs.

MAL

Come back here and open the door you <piece of rodent dropping not good enough to be a donkey's enema>!

He gets one cuff undone, and finishes the second easily.

MAL (cont'd)

I'll show you, after I get out of this...

(looks around the room)

...really nice room.

There's a PLATE OF FOOD on a serving table in the middle of the room. He grabs a piece of bread and eats as he inspects the rest of the room.

INARA (OS)

(very faint)

Mal... Mal, are you there?

Mal walks across to the balcony door.

He opens the door and finds that bars block his escape.

INARA

Mal, can you hear me?

Inara is at her own barred balcony. She and Mal can look onto the COURTYARD below, but cannot see each other.

MAL

(trying to look around the corner)

You okay?

INARA

I'm fine. As fine as I can be.

(beat)

Atherton left dinner in the room. My favorite.

MAL

Smells good. He's so thoughtful.

INARA

He's insane. I don't know what he hopes to gain from this.

MAL

Revenge. He wants revenge.

They look through the balcony railings to the landscaped tree-dotted courtyard.

INARA

It's a beautiful evening.

MAL

That it is. Ain't gonna be so pretty tomorrow, I figure.

(beat)

But at least we can keep each other company.

INARA

Right. Great.

Separated by the wall, they look out into the night.

EXT. SPACE

Serenity flies through the black.

INT. SERENITY – FOREDECK HALL – SAME TIME

Jayne, Kaylee and Simon stand on the stairs leading to the bridge. Further down the corridor, near the dining room entrance, River ballet-dances to music that only she hears.

JAYNE

On my ship, we got a little somethin' called the chain of command. You will address me as Captain.

(pleased with himself)

Kaylee, you're my first mate.

SIMON

This is ludicrous.

KAYLEE

(to Jayne)

Ain't but one Cap'n to this ship, and—

The ship lurches quickly to the left then to the right, throwing the three of them into one another.

Down the hall, River remains perfectly balanced on one foot.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Nico's at the controls, grinning, a sheen of sweat on her face, her arm still in a cast. She holds the cast up and waves back at the trio on the foredeck hall.

NICO
Sorry! Not used to this thing yet!

INT. SERENITY – FOREDECK HALL – SAME TIME

Kaylee, Jayne, and Simon steady themselves.

SIMON
(indicating the bridge)
She shouldn't even be able to stand. Do you understand how many drugs she's on? And those are only the ones I gave her!

JAYNE
Best get her in shape, doc, 'cause she's goin' in with me.

Simon just shakes his head.

JAYNE (cont'd)
What, doc? You wanna back me up? Maybe your nutjob sister?

River pirouettes down the hall toward them.

RIVER
Could do a lot worse than me, big man.

Again, the ship jerks.

NICO (OS)
(edgy laugh)
Oops! I'm getting it, I'm getting it...

SIMON
(shakes his head)
Ludicrous.

EXT. ATHERTON'S MANSION – BALCONY DOORWAYS - NIGHT

Inara and Mal sit on the floor, back to back, leaning against the wall that separates them.

MAL
...and then they left. Never thought I'd see the day my right hand gone up and left me.

INARA

I'm sorry, Mal.

MAL

Nothin' to be sorry about. They're with good folk. We'll see them from time to time. Was bound to happen, soon's they looked into each other's eyes and saw t'other lookin' back the same way. Loyalty's one thing. Love, though...

Beat.

INARA

How's my shuttle?

MAL

Your shuttle? Empty as well.

INARA

Haven't found a new tenant?

MAL

No. We've been... busy of late. Things seemed to have settled down some, and then...

(motions to the room)

This. Any chance, we get outta this in one piece, or at least in pieces Simon can put back together again, that shuttle become yours again?

INARA

Are you asking me to come back?

MAL

(hesitates)

No. Just... givin' you the opportunity. You've got first dibs, is all, if you want it.

Inara opens her mouth to answer, but is cut off.

MAL (cont'd)

Couldn't see how you would, though. Your new digs, way I remember it, is spacious. Better for entertaining.

INARA

Better...

MAL

So how many has it been? Clients.

INARA

There are so many levels on which that's none of your business.

MAL

Come on, death on my doorstep, can't be truthsome with an old friend?

INARA

Well, let's see, five months, minimum three hour visit, plus regulars and extended contracts, allowing holidays...

(does the math in her head)

...none.

MAL

None.

INARA

I've been teaching, Mal. You know that.

MAL

So, none.

(beat)

How 'bout non-clients?

INARA

Let it go, Mal.

MAL

I did that once.

They sit quietly, back-to-back, separated by the wall, looking away from each other.

EXT. SPACE ABOVE PERSEPHONE

Serenity arrives. Persephone is dark below, a faint light rising on the horizon.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Jayne, wearing a bandolier of grenades, shoulders his gun VERA and faces Kaylee.

JAYNE

Now, we don't come back, I want you to take the ship and get clear. Don't you wait for us none, and don't let the doc try to perform no stupid heroics.

(beat)

We don't come back, he's all you an' his sister got.

KAYLEE

You'll be back, and you'll have the Cap'n with you.

JAYNE

But if we don't...

(aw, shucks)

I wanna know you'll be safe.

She stands on her tiptoes and kisses his cheek.

Jayne suddenly finds it very important to check his weapons.

NICO (OS)

Hope those bounty hunters're still there.

Nico stands by the infirmary entrance, a number of knives and small firearms tucked into her clothing. She looks like she's ready for anything.

NICO (cont'd)

Curious to see how they fight when they're the ones ambushed.

Simon comes up behind her.

SIMON

I suspect they've been paid and are long gone by now.

NICO

Ah, hell, doctor, my curiosity's not too particular. I'll take anyone that gets in my way. <I'm thirsty for blood>.

Jayne heads toward the stairs and motions for Nico to follow him.

He hobbles up the stairs, bouncing on his good foot; halfway up she stumbles and barely avoids knocking her cast into the railing.

Simon moves over to stand with Kaylee and watch them.

SIMON

Do we have any sort of backup plan?

INT. SERENITY – SHUTTLE ONE- SAME TIME

The back half of the shuttle is filled with small piles of PACKING CRATES, some of them open. River stands among them, balanced on one foot in a dancer's pose.

As the door opens and Jayne and Nico hobble in, River sinks down and hides among the crates.

INT. ATHERTON'S MANSION - MAL'S ROOM - DAWN

Mal sleeps against the wall. A KNOCK sounds from the door.

MAL
(waking)
Kaylee? What's all that racket comin' from-

A second KNOCK comes from the door. Mal looks around, realizes where he is, and walks to the door.

MAL
Yes? I don't have one of your fancy knobs, so I don't know what you expect me to do.

WINTERS (OS)
I expect you to not resist, Mr. Reynolds.

The door opens, revealing Winters, armed security guards, and a handcuffed Inara.

Mal catches the handcuffs Winters tosses to him.

EXT. ATHERTON'S MANSION - COURTYARD - MORNING - ESTABLISHING

The morning sun shines across Atherton's estate, cutting through the morning mist. Serenity's shuttle flies down in the distance.

EXT. ATHERTON'S MANSION - COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Mal and Inara walk out into the courtyard, pressed on by Winters and the guards.

Atherton waits in a grassy clearing, a sword in each hand, with an uncomfortable-looking Badger and Tunstall nearby.

Tunstall holds the arm of LORD WARRICK HARROW (Mal's favorite "lord with a sash" from "Shindig").

MAL
Warrick Harrow?

HARROW
Yes, it's me, lad.

Winters unlocks Mal's handcuffs.

MAL
What's he—?

Atherton pitches Mal a sword. Mal catches it.

ATHERTON
You had to have your second.

Atherton raises his own sword.

WINTERS
There has been a challenge!

INARA
Atherton, what are you—

MAL
Well, I don't accept!

Atherton moves forward, eyes full of murder.

ATHERTON
It is time to set things right.



Act Three

EXT. ATHERTON'S MANSION – COURTYARD – CONTINUOUS

Atherton steps towards Mal, sword up.

MAL
(backing away, sword still down)
Whoa whoa whoa! I ain't fightin' you!

ATHERTON
Yes, Captain, you are.

Atherton strikes out and Mal dodges it, circling back and away.

HARROW
Atherton Wing, this is madness! Killing this man, winning this woman, it changes nothing. You lost. Let it go, before you lose everything.

ATHERTON
I will win my honor back...
(strikes out again)
Raise your sword!

INARA
Atherton, please, listen to reason!

MAL
(dodging)
I ain't gonna allow you to relive that day, Ath, and have it turn out the way you wanted it to. That day's past. All folk have one of 'em. Be a man an' deal with it like everyone else.

Mal throws down his sword. Atherton glares at him.

ATHERTON
So you will not fight?

MAL
You want to kill me, you'll have to kill me like the coward you are. No heroics for you.

Atherton strides over to Lord Harrow.

ATHERTON
Well then, I'll just have to fight your second!

HARROW
Atherton, what are you—?

MAL
No!

Atherton runs Lord Harrow through the chest. He's dead before he hits the ground.

Inara bends down to check him. Badger reacts with shock – he is not pleased. Tunstall flinches, but is calm.

Mal snatches up his sword and charges Atherton.

Grinning, Atherton pulls his own sword free and blocks Mal's attack.

ATHERTON
That's the spirit I've been waiting for, Captain!

EXT. ATHERTON WING'S ESTATE – ORCHARD – SAME TIME

Jayne and Nico walk stealthily through the orchard.

A HAND reaches up and taps Jayne on the shoulder.

Jayne whirls, aiming Vera at—

JAYNE

Wha—?!?

River puts a finger to her lips, silencing him, then points through the trees at a pair of liveried WORKERS who are picking fruit of the trees and placing them in large baskets.

She motions to Jayne and Nico that they can go around.

EXT. ATHERTON'S MANSION – COURTYARD – SAME TIME

Inara looks up at Atherton from Lord Harrow's body.

INARA

You're insane!

Atherton pushes Mal off, the swords CLANGING together.

ATHERTON

He volunteered to be your Captain's second, my dear.

(strikes out; blocked)

He knew the risks.

As Atherton glances at Inara, Mal makes a surprisingly coordinated counterattack and slices off part of Atherton's ear.

Atherton SHRIEKS in pain as the blood begins to flow down his neck; he lashes out and forces Mal back, cupping his wounded ear.

MAL

Don't worry about that none, Ath. Had that done to me once. It sews right back.

Atherton YELLS with fury and charges.

MAL (cont'd)

Oh, *gos-se...*

Atherton strikes again and again, Mal backing up with each blow, clearly outmatched.

With a sweeping motion Atherton disarms Mal, then kicks him to the ground.

Mal rises to his knees, Atherton's sword at his throat, reminiscent of "Shindig."

ATHERTON
Say it, Inara!

INARA
(confused)
Say what?

MAL
"Stop?"

ATHERTON
(to Inara, not looking away from Mal)
The words you said to me before! Say them!

EXT. ATHERTON WING'S ESTATE – ORCHARD – SAME TIME

River walks "point" ahead of Jayne and Nico.

River changes paths, once, then again, doubling back on herself.

NICO
You want to explain the logic in following her? How old is she, twelve?

JAYNE
Uh, she's got real good hearin'. Like a gorram bat. With legs.

RIVER
Shhh...

NICO
Don't you shush me! Shush me again, and I'll—

River suddenly jumps back, and puts her hand over Nico's mouth—

Just as a SECURITY GUARD walks past. Had River not stopped them, they would have been directly in his path.

Jayne looks at Nico again, and Nico gives a "Yeah, okay, maybe she's not useless" look.

River waves her hand to get their attention, then points at an Asian-style STONE GAZEBO near the edge of the orchard.

EXT. ATHERTON'S MANSION – COURTYARD – SAME TIME

Mal, on his knees with Atherton's sword to his throat, looks over to Inara and shakes his head.

MAL

Don't you dare, Inara! Don't you buy my life with that kinda coin!

ATHERTON

Say it, Inara! Or I take his head!

MAL

(shouting at Inara)

You pretend to be a lady and want everyone to bow before you and kiss your hand, but you ain't nothin' but a common whore!

INARA

I know what you're trying to do, Mal, but it's too... I've made my choice.

(looks away to Atherton)

I'll... stay. Exclusive to you...

(looks at Mal)

If you let him live.

Inara can't bear to look at Mal. Beat.

ATHERTON

And a very good memory for a whore, wouldn't you say, Captain? She almost got her lines exactly right. I, on the other hand, make no mistakes.

(beat)

"For a man to lie beaten yet breathing, it makes him a coward."

(beat)

"It's humiliation." And I'm sure you'll remember this one, Captain. "Mercy is the mark of a great man."

MAL

(furious, but helpless)

Shoulda killed you when I had the chance.

Atherton knees Mal in the face. Mal sprawls in the grass.

Atherton pitches his sword to Winters and takes Inara's cuffed hand.

ATHERTON

I accept your offer.

INT. SERENITY – ENGINE ROOM – SAME TIME

Simon bursts in on Kaylee, who's fiddling with a piece of machinery.

SIMON

River's gone. I can't find her anywhere.

KAYLEE

Maybe she just hid real good this time.

SIMON

You don't think she... was on the shuttle, do you?

Kaylee puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

KAYLEE

We'll find her. There's no need to—

A BLARING ALARM suddenly resounds throughout the ship.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

That's the proximity alert.

SIMON

The shuttle?

KAYLEE

No alerts for our own shuttles. This is somethin' else.

EXT. MANSION – VIEWED THROUGH BINOCULARS

Tunstall prods Mal through the front door, held open by Badger.

EXT. ATHERTON WING'S ESTATE – ORCHARD – GAZEBO

Jayne lowers the binoculars. He and Nico crouch in the gazebo.

JAYNE

This's the place. They got Mal.

NICO

(pops a pill)

About time we get started! Figured we'd've at least tripped an alarm by now.

JAYNE
You an' me both. But thanks to River here—
(looks around)
Hey, where's River?

The two of them are alone.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE MAL'S ROOM – SOME TIME LATER

Badger holds the door open while Mal and Tunstall struggle. Although Mal is handcuffed, he's got both hands on the doorframe, keeping himself out of the room.

TUNSTALL
I'm not asking.

MAL
Hell with this!

Mal surges against Tunstall, getting the upper hand for a beat.

Then Tunstall HEADBUTTS him. Hard. Before Mal can recover, Tunstall tosses him in the room.

TUNSTALL
(to Badger)
Close it!

Badger slams the door, yanks off the magnetic lock, and leans against the door.

TUNSTALL (cont'd)
Wily one, that Reynolds. Gotta respect his efforts. Shame he won't see tomorrow. But that's up to you.

Tunstall starts to walk away, down the hall.

BADGER
Wait a bleedin' minute! Where d'you think your goin'?

TUNSTALL
He's back in his room. I've been paid. My job's done.

BADGER
You can't just leave!

TUNSTALL
Should be happy I stayed this long.

Tunstall tosses Badger one of his weapons.

Badger drops the magnetic knob and catches the weapon in both hands. It's a kit-based TASER RIFLE, bulky, ugly and functional, with four STEEL BARBS protruding around the barrel, almost like a multi-shot harpoon gun.

BADGER
(studying the weapon)
What the 'ell am I supposed to do wi—

Tunstall walks away.

TUNSTALL
(over his shoulder)
Good luck.

Badger looks at the gun, then to Mal's closed door, face uncertain.

INT. ATHERTON WING'S ROOM – SAME TIME

Atherton and Winters confer in the doorway. Inara stands inside the room, her hands still cuffed in front of her.

ATHERTON
My affairs are in order for the rest of the day, Winters. I trust that you and the staff will handle the cleanup?

WINTERS
Yes, sir. You should have your ear looked—

ATHERTON
(looking back at Inara)
I'm not to be disturbed for anything. Am I clear?
Anything.

Winters nods.

Atherton steps into the room.

ATHERTON (cont'd)
Music!

Music begins to play – the same ORCHESTRAL DANCE MUSIC from "Shindig."

ATHERTON (cont'd)
And now, my dear, at last, I have you all to myself...

Atherton closes the door, leaving Winters alone in the hallway.

EXT. ATHERTON WING'S ESTATE – GAZEBO – SAME TIME

From their position, Nico and Jayne can see a few guards patrolling the courtyard.

JAYNE

Now, we need a plan. Gotta go in all quiet-like.

NICO

Why? You got your grenades and I got my sparkling personality.

JAYNE

We're facin' superior num— Hey! What're you doin'?!?

Nico yanks Vera off Jayne's back, and takes aim.

JAYNE (cont'd)

(stage whisper)

What're you ruttin' doin'!

Nico fires.

One of the mansion's windows explodes. A loud ALARM goes off.

NICO

There's less than half a dozen! We can take 'em!

She starts running in the direction of the courtyard, firing as she goes.

NICO (cont'd)

Hey! *Wu ming shao jwu* <nameless little foot soldiers>!

We're over here!

More SECURITY GUARDS run out of the mansion and take up positions.

INT. MAL'S ROOM – DAY

Mal stands at the door, listening to the MUFFLED ALARM.

MAL

(yelling at the door)

Hear that, Badger? You're in over your head, you ruttin' bastard, you know that, right? Send some bounty hunters to nab a freighter captain of questionable repute. Even a registered Companion, that's one thing. But this...

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE MAL'S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Badger looks down at Tunstall's taser rifle, and finds a POWER KNOB. He dials the voltage all the way up into the red. The weapon hums.

MAL (cont'd, OS, muffled, through door)
Warrick Harrow's dead. You think the authorities ain't gonna take notice? When your good friend Ath needs a scapegoat, who d'ya think it's gonna be?

BADGER
Shut it, Reynolds! We're partners, Wing an' I! He respects me!

RIVER (OS)
Nobody respects you.

River stands at the end of the hall, hands behind her back.

MAL (OS, muffled, through door)
Badger? What's going on?

River closes the distance between her and Badger.

RIVER
(mimicking Badger's accent)
Let 'im out.

BADGER
Ain't exactly in the plan, sweetheart.

He points the taser rifle toward her.

River brings her hands forward. She's carrying a KNIFE, possibly one of Nico's.

RIVER
(mimicking Badger's accent)
It is now.

INT. ATHERTON WING'S BEDROOM – SAME TIME

Inara steps back, terrified but attempting to stay calm. She sees her belongings near the bed – a small, ornate TRUNK – and rushes toward it.

ATHERTON
Captain Tunstall removed anything he felt you might use as a weapon, so please don't try. It doesn't suit you.

INARA
How do you know what suits me? You disgust me!

Atherton grabs a towel draped across a chair and wipes at his bloody neck.

ATHERTON
We can get the rest of your belongings, of course, once you explain to your Companions' Guild that you'll be taking up residence with me. I apologize for my appearance. I must look ghastly.

(cold)

You had eyes for me once, Inara. They shined. And a smile. But look at you now. Hardened. Bitter. Reynolds is Right. Nothing but a whore!

Atherton rushes forward and strikes her across the face. She falls back onto the bed.

ATHERTON (cont'd)
But you're my whore!

He hits her a second time with his fist. She falls back, groggy, her lips bloody.

He jumps up on the bed and grabs her cuffed hands, lifting her up and draping the chain of the handcuffs over a bedpost. He sits on her legs and begins to unbutton his pants.

INARA
Atherton... Atherton, please...

ATHERTON
You are mine, Inara. Mine today. Mine tomorrow. Mine forever.

INARA
Please... My trunk. There's a small box. With a syringe.
It's a contraceptive. Please...
(she looks up at him)
Don't bring another life into this...

Atherton stops and eyes Inara for a moment.

He moves to the trunk; opens it; searches inside and finds the SMALL BOX.

He opens it.

Inside the box is a tiny SYRINGE GUN and a VIAL OF BLACK FLUID. Unmarked.

INARA (cont'd)
Inject me with it, and I won't fight it. I won't fight.

Atherton pops the vial into the syringe and sweeps her dress up, exposing her legs.

ATHERTON
Whatever you wish, my dear. And please...
(injects her in the leg; she shivers)
Do fight.



Act Four

INT. HALL OUTSIDE MAL'S ROOM – SAME TIME

River, knife in hand, walks slowly toward Badger. Badger points the taser rifle at River.

BADGER
We both know you ain't gonna use that shiny piece, little girl, so why don't you just 'and it over?

River smiles. Advances.

BADGER (cont'd)
'and it over now! This'll do more'n tickle, lil' girl!

MAL (OS, muffled, through door)
What? What's going on?

RIVER
(mimicking Badger)
Never had the steel to settle things for yourself.

BADGER
Stay back.

She opens her arms wide, offering him a target.

RIVER
(mimicking Badger, still smiling)
Do it. If you can.

He holds up one hand, indicating she should stop.

BADGER
You stay back, girl!

She takes a sudden dancing step forward, and slashes his palm with the knife.

BADGER (cont'd)
(stunned)
Wha...

He drops the taser rifle and looks at his hand.

MAL (OS, muffled, through door)
What the gorram hell is goin' on out there?!?

BADGER
You cut me!

River pockets the knife, picks up the knob and takes a step toward the door.

RIVER
Stay very still. He's very mad.

EXT. COURTYARD – SAME TIME

Nico and Jayne run for cover behind a FOUNTAIN.

NICO
Another damn fountain...

They exchange shots with a half-dozen security guards armed with Alliance-style "energy shooters," Some coming from the mansion, others from the orchard.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE MAL'S ROOM – SAME TIME

River opens the door into Mal's room. Mal steps out, charges at Badger.

BADGER
Mal, I—

MAL
I've had about enough of you!

Mal, still handcuffed, smashes his intertwined fists into Badger's mouth. There's a CRACKING NOISE – probably teeth – as Badger flies back into the wall and falls to his knees.

Mal circles around and drapes the chain of his handcuffs around Badger's throat. He drags him kicking back into the room.

EXT. COURTYARD – FOUNTAIN – SAME TIME

Jayne and Nico crouch behind the stone structure, periodically popping out and firing at the security guards, who return fire uselessly.

JANE

Least they just got them Alliance pea-shooters...
(tosses a grenade at the orchard guards)
But what the ruttin' hell were you thinkin'?!?

NICO

C'mon, Jayne, admit it. This way is much more fun.

Jayne, for once, is at a loss for words.

NICO

We should be able to hold 'em off for—
(jumps out and shoots)
Well, this looks interesting.

Jayne pokes his head out, seeing what she's seeing.

Winters has arrived, along with four more security guards. They're setting up a massive "FUTURE GATLING GUN" mounted on a pair of heavy tires.

INT. MAL'S ROOM – SAME TIME

Mal chokes Badger with his handcuffs. Badger pulls at the chain.

MAL

What was that? I don't understand what you're saying.

BADGER

Don't... kill... me!

MAL (cont'd)

<Worthless piece of garbage>.

(pulls harder)

You betray me. Hunt me. Torment me an' mine...

Badger can't breathe. Can't talk.

RIVER (OS)

(mimicking Badger)

Was jus' business, Malcolm. Betrayal's jus' the way o' the worlds.

River stands in the doorway, holding the taser rifle, aimed down. Mal looks at her. Back at Badger.

MAL
If she's seein' the truth of things, I'm doin' the worlds a favor.

Mal pulls harder.

RIVER
(her own voice)
Don't. He's weak.
(moves closer)
Didn't do it out of hate. Or even fear. Did it out of respect. Love, even.

River and Mal face one another over Badger.

RIVER (cont'd)
He loves you in his own way, you know. Much as a man like him can. You're what he can't be. Ever. What he wants to be every minute of every day. A man of honor. Respect.

She touches the chain at Badger's neck, fingers brushing Mal's hand.

RIVER (cont'd)
Don't change that.

Beat. Mal's and River's eyes lock.

Mal releases Badger, who falls forward at River's feet, wheezing.

MAL
Persephone ain't your home no more, Badger. I'll be back this way, and it's best you be gone before I am. Won't have no mercy for you next time.

River tenses suddenly, eyes closed, an expression of pain and anguish on her face.

RIVER
No! Stop! Oh, God. Please stop!

Her eyes SNAP open and she looks straight at Mal.

RIVER (cont'd)
Go! Go save her!

Mal snatches the taser rifle from River and rushes out of the room.

Left alone, Badger looks up at River, and River reaches a hand down, almost touching Badger's brow.

BADGER

Thank you, little one. You've saved me. Anythin' I have...
Anythin' I can do... Thank you...

RIVER

Don't thank me.
(turns away)
Didn't do it for you.
(steps into the hallway)
I did it for him.

She walks through the door and shuts it behind her, locking Badger in.

EXT. TUNSTALL'S SHIP – SAME TIME

Tunstall approaches his ship. SIRENS and GUNFIRE can be heard in the distance. As he reaches the door, a FIGURE steps out from the shadows behind him.

Tunstall spins around, reaching for his sidearm, but not drawing it.

TUNSTALL

Sir?

EXT. COURTYARD – FOUNTAIN – SAME TIME

Nico and Jayne hunker down inside the fountain now, behind the wall of the pool. Stone pieces splash in the shallow water around them as the Gatling gun slowly and methodically destroys the structure.

Nico tries to get up and take a shot, but is forced back down. She looks up at the fountain above, at an ANGEL CHERUB with a horn spouting water.

NICO

(clumsily reloads)

Worse places to die, I guess. Angels lookin' down on us.

The cherub's face gets blown off.

JAYNE

Ain't no angels lookin'...

A NEW SOUND from above, like the DRONE OF ENGINES. Jayne looks up.

ANGLE ON – FOUNTAIN FROM BELOW

Above the shattered remains of the angel, SERENITY drops out of the sky.

Zoe drops out of her belly on a rappel line.

EXT. COURTYARD – SAME TIME

CLOSE ON Zoe, rifle in her hands, goggles over her eyes, firing as fast as she can pull the trigger.

ACROSS THE COURTYARD

The gunner behind the gatling gun drops, followed quickly by Winters and others. The remaining security guards return fire.

BACK AT THE FOUNTAIN

Zoe reaches the end of her rappel line and releases her harness. She drops the last few feet, rifle still in hand, still firing.

Jayne and Nico rise from the fountain and join her. The three of them take out the remaining guards.

WASH (via Zoe's com)
How we doin' out there, baby?

ZOE
(grins)
Perfect.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Wash sits at the controls, smiling.

ZOE (cont'd, via com)
Great flying, sweetie.

WASH
This ship makes it easy.

He pats the console.

EXT. TUNSTALL'S SHIP – SAME TIME

Book stands before Tunstall.

TUNSTALL

I don't understand, sir. What are you doing here?

BOOK

The man you took and his crew are under my protection. They are my friends. They're not to be harmed. No matter what the price. Am I clear?

TUNSTALL

I didn't know they were friends of yours, sir. If I had—

BOOK

Best you disappear, Captain. Don't complicate things further.

TUNSTALL

(salutes)

Yes sir.

Tunstall backs away into his ship, not turning his back on Book.

INT. ATHERTON'S ROOM – SAME TIME

CLOSE ON Inara's face, sideways, staring straight ahead. Her neck is bruised in the shapes of fingers. The MUSIC still plays.

We pull back and see that Inara lies on the bed, no longer handcuffed, naked beneath the sheets covering her. Behind her, Atherton stands, draping a robe across his shoulders.

ATHERTON

Wonderful, my dear. Simply spectacular. I apologize for my... exuberance.

Atherton flexes his hands as if they are sore.

ATHERTON (cont'd)

We'll dine alone this evening, and tomorrow as well. I expect that you'll contact your Guild at earliest opportunity and explain things to them.

Inara sits up, pulling the blanket with her.

ATHERTON (cont'd)

Once that unsavory business is out of the way, *bao bei*, we'll host a grand ball to introduce you to—

INARA

There will be no ball.

ATHERTON

But of course there—

INARA

No, there won't. I need to explain a few things to you.

Holding the sheets around herself, she bends down and picks up the empty syringe.

She stares at it for a beat.

Across the room, Atherton coughs lightly, and puts a hand to his chest.

INARA (cont'd)

You've never understood how the Guild works. You think you do, but you don't at all.

She returns the syringe to the box and snaps it shut.

INARA (cont'd)

I suspect that by now, you're beginning to feel a tightness in your chest. Light-headedness, perhaps nausea.

ATHERTON

What—? What have you done to me?

INARA

You did it to yourself, Atherton, when you forced yourself on an unwilling Companion.

ATHERTON

(takes a step toward her)

What... do you mean?

INARA

It hurts, doesn't it? In the shoulders, the arms? Possibly the jaw.

Atherton gasps. Panics. His eyes widen. His hands fly to his throat.

INARA (cont'd)

I see the shortness of breath is setting in early. I'd anticipate that you have no more than three minutes to live, possibly as little as ninety seconds.

ATHERTON
(gasping)
Wha—?

Atherton takes a stumbling step toward her. She moves away from him easily.

INARA
Next should be—

Across the room, the door BURSTS in, and Mal flies in, having shouldered it.

MAL
Don't you touch her!

Atherton turns as Mal raises the taser rifle.

Every time Mal pulls the trigger, one of the barbs from the taser rifle shoots out toward Atherton, trailing a metal cable. One misses Atherton entirely, but the others hit, two in the chest, one in the shoulder.

Each pull of the trigger also sends electricity up every metal cable, jerking Atherton like a psychotic marionette.

Atherton falls to the floor, twitching. Mal pulls the trigger again, for good measure, jolting him.

Atherton stops twitching. Mal looks genuinely surprised.

White froth spills out of Atherton's mouth. His glassy eyes stare out with shock. Dead.

Mal opens his mouth to say something, but sees Inara's state. He stops, mouth agape, completely aghast, devastated.

Mal and Inara look at one another over the body.

EXT. PERSEPHONE – EAVESDOWN DOCKS – ESTABLISHING

Serenity sits at the docks.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY – SAME TIME

Kaylee hugs Inara as Mal and Simon stand nearby. Zoe, Jayne, Nico, and River are there as well.

Book walks in through the open airlock doors, and Mal moves to greet him.

MAL
(surprised)
Shepherd.

BOOK
(smiling)
Figured you'd need someone to read over you if this lot
didn't do their job.

Book gives Jayne an affectionate clap on the shoulder.

Wash comes down the stairs from the upper catwalk.

WASH
No chatter on the Cortex. If anyone cares about Atherton
being dead, they must not care too much.

Wash joins Zoe, putting an arm around her.

MAL
Still, I don't expect we'll be visitin' Persephone again any
time soon, just to be on the safe side.
(to Book)
Come on, Shepherd. Don't want you to keep Bern and
Millie waitin'. I'll walk you over so I can thank 'em for
comin'.

BOOK
I'm afraid that thanks will have to wait. They took off
already.

MAL
Don't that leave you stranded?

BOOK
Thought I might take the long way home. That is, if you
don't mind flying an old preacher out of Persephone.

MAL
(smiles)
Wouldn't be the first time.

They all just stand for a beat. This is the first time our old crew has been together
for quite some time, and they all know it.

As Book heads for the dorms, Zoe and Wash look at each other, then Mal.

MAL
What about you two? You need a ride?

WASH
Already home, Captain.

A silent look between Zoe and Mal.

WASH (cont'd)
I had to adjust my chair, Mal. Who's been flying this thing?

Zoe grabs Wash's hand and starts to pull him toward the stairs.

ZOE
Come on, we got some unpacking to do.

WASH
Unpacking? What about that thing you promised me if I got us here in record time?

ACROSS THE CARGO BAY

Simon gently touches Inara's arm.

SIMON
If you don't mind, Inara, we should...

Inara nods, and Kaylee takes her other arm as they move toward the infirmary.

Mal watches them go, then turns to Jayne and Nico.

MAL
Thanks. Both of you. For comin' after me.

Jayne shuffles his feet.

MAL (cont'd)
River told me how you drew the guards so she could get to me. Good thinkin', though I don't imagine it's endeared you none to Simon.

Jayne looks at River, who smiles, then back to Mal.

JAYNE
(a little uncomfortable)
Sure, Mal. Any time.

Mal nods to Nico, and heads for the stairs; River follows him, leaving Jayne and Nico alone.

Nico picks up her bag with her uncasted hand and shoulders it.

NICO
(nods)
Jayne.

JAYNE
(nods)
Nico.

Nico turns and walks off. When she's at the airlock door—

RIVER
(from catwalk)
Nico is a boy's name!

Nico turns. Beat. She keeps walking down the ramp.

RIVER (cont'd)
(to Jayne)
Well, it is.

Jayne shakes his head and smacks the BUTTON that closes the airlock doors.

EXT. SPACE – LATER

Serenity flies away from Persephone.

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY/COMMON AREA

Mal arrives at the doorway to the infirmary, which is blockaded by Book. Inside, Inara lies on the examination table. Simon, standing at her side, nods to Mal.

BOOK
You're the last person she needs to see right now, son.
Leave her be.

Mal glares at Book, then steps around him.

Simon hesitates, but looks at Mal's face, and leaves quietly.

Mal stands for a beat, looking awkwardly at Inara as she rises from the table.

MAL
Kaylee's makin' up a room for you. She could set things up in your shuttle, if you want, for old time's sake.

INARA
It's not my shuttle, Mal.

MAL

I know, but... If you wanted... I was hop— I mean, if you wanted it, we could do that. It's, you know, bigger than the guest rooms.

(beat)

Familiar.

INARA

(looks away)

Mal... I can't pretend... after what happened...

(looks at him)

If you could just take me home, please.

He nods; turns to leave, but pauses, his back to her.

He returns and takes her hand in his.

MAL

I'm sorry, Inara.

He bends and gently kisses her hand.

Mal leaves the room.

Inara, left alone, looks down at her hand, which begins to shake.

BLACKOUT